

Las Cruces, NM – Today, Harry Teague announced that New Mexico has been awarded \$396,160 to fund programs that aim to enhance the competitiveness of the state's specialty crops. The grant, awarded through the USDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant program, will help bolster specialty crop producers and raise the profile of the regional crops.

"New Mexico's specialty crops, like Hatch's famous chile, are an essential part of our local economy. By supporting our local farmers and helping to expand the market for New Mexico's specialty crops, we create more jobs by keeping more money here in New Mexico businesses," said Harry Teague. "The Specialty Crop Block Grant program is key in helping these signature crops succeed in the market, which is why I've introduced my Specialty Crop Enhancement Act to expand the program and encourage agriculture operations in New Mexico."

The grant, which highlights New Mexico's chile, wine, and dry onion crops, among others, will fund eight programs through New Mexico's Department of Agriculture to provide outreach on the region's specialty crops. Initiatives include outreach to highlight the products at trade fairs, increase the market share nationally, consumer outreach, as well as a program partnering with New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) to train NMED and Cooperative Extension Service personnel as well as farmer's market managers on the regulations and food safety issues related solely to home-based specialty crop processing and to provide a curriculum to train specialty crop home-based processors.

Last week, Harry Teague introduced the Specialty Crop Enhancement Act, his latest bill to promote New Mexico agriculture. The Act would increase the funding available for the USDA's Specialty Crop Block grant program in efforts to encourage the competitiveness of local specialty crops. Some of the issues that will be addressed as a result of the legislation include improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems, investing in specialty crop

research, and fostering organic and sustainable production practices.

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